

A. police assault Panthers

By Patty Lee Parmalee
Guardian Los Angeles Bureau

Los Angeles

Quick and heroic thinking may have prevented more murders of Black Panther party members by police last week. That is the real story behind the gunfight between the Panthers and Los Angeles police.

Just four days after two ranking Illinois Panthers were shot to death during a police raid on a party office in Chicago, Los Angeles police conducted similar raids on three offices here—one of which, at Panther regional headquarters, resulted in the nearly six-hour gun battle.

The police attacks began before dawn Dec. 8. First, police barged into the office-home of Panther leader Elmer Pratt. The second attack was at the Toure community center—named for Panther Wally “Toure” Pope, killed by police Sept. 20—where police threw tear gas. Ten Panthers were arrested in these raids.

The final and largest raid was at the two-story brick building which serves as Los Angeles headquarters, where police had gone on an alleged search for illegal weapons.

Eleven party members, including two women, held off some 300 policemen, withstood gas and automatic weapons fire and refused to leave the building until it was assured newsmen and other civilians would be allowed to witness their surrender.

The besieged Panthers feared that without witnesses they would have been murdered, as were Fred Hampton and Mark Clark a few days earlier in Chicago. There was no question of winning the fight against such odds. “We gave up because it’s not the right time,” said Renee Moore, 19, after she was arrested. “We’ll fight again when the odds are more in our favor.”

The three raids resulted in 21 arrests. Five policemen and seven Panthers were wounded in the headquarters attack. Police claim to have found a storehouse of illegal weapons in the building, but the Panthers charge the weapons were planted on the scene after they left.

Community support for the Panthers developed immediately. Leading black political representatives have called for investigations. Some 5000 people protested the attack in a rally at city hall Dec. 11.

Few people in the black community believe the police version of the attack. According to a Los Angeles police spokesman, the raids were conducted 10 days after police lieutenant Ted Morton was ordered out of the headquarters at gunpoint after requesting that a loudspeaker be turned down. Returning before dawn Dec. 8 with search and arrest warrants, police said there was no answer when they knocked on the door. After they demolished the front door with a battering ram and entered the building, they were met with submachine gun and shotgun fire. Three of the four cops inside were wounded. Reinforcements were called to bolster the nearly 80-man force around the building and the siege began.

Awakened by gunfire

The Panthers tell a quite different version.

The nine men and two women sleeping in headquarter apartments were awakened in the pre-dawn darkness by the sound of gunfire splintering the front door. They jumped from their beds without fully dressing and began shooting back. When police fired tear and pepper gas into the building they did the best they could with two gas masks, passing them from person to person.

During the battle the Panthers called community and radical organizations and sympathetic individuals, informing them of the attack and urging them to gather near headquarters at 4115 S. Central Ave. as witnesses. They also called all the press in hopes the presence of reporters would deter police from murder.

Lawyers and friends of the Panthers, including the Rev. Blaise Bonpane, a Roman Catholic priest expelled from Guatemala two years ago for sympathizing with the guerrillas there, intervened with police to allow reporters to be present at the surrender. The

press and other civilians had been kept about three blocks away, allegedly as a safety precaution.

Police finally relented and allowed reporters to station themselves near the building. Informed of this by telephone, the Panthers waved a white cloth out a window at 9:45 a.m. and firing ceased.

Bonpane said that during the hour he talked with police they were awaiting the command to let go with everything they had, including an armed helicopter circling overhead, a borrowed National Guard personnel carrier and other counter-insurgency equipment. The Catholic priest said one of the main reasons police finally allowed the Panthers to surrender was "fear of another Watts," a reference to the black rebellion in the same neighborhood in 1965. "Reports were coming in of disturbances all around the battle site," Bonpane recalled. "The police were

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Police hold two LA Panthers after pre-dawn shootout.

afraid they were being surrounded and at that point they allowed the Panthers to surrender."

Several of the Panther wounded were in serious condition. Wayne Pharr, 19, was wounded in the left arm, wrist and the left portion of his chest. Roland Freeman, 24, was shot in both arms. Tommie Williams, 19, was shot in both legs. Renee Moore, cut

Tommye Williams, 19, was shot in both legs. Renee Moore, cut and bruised, suffered a miscarriage during the attack. Tight security precautions, such as mounds of sandbags, probably prevented the Panthers from being cut to pieces. Police exploded two dynamite charges on the roof of the building but were unable to gain entrance.

The attack on the Panther headquarters was the first battle assignment for the Los Angeles police department's elite SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) Squad. The group was formed two years ago to combat ghetto insurgency. The squad receives special military training and weapons to carry out "missions involving great danger." Their uniforms consist of black jump suits, black caps, boots, bullet-proof vests or flack jackets and military-type weapons, such as M-16 rifles.

The special squad began deploying around 3:30 a.m., surrounding the headquarters and cordonning off 16 blocks in the vicinity. During the fight, SWAT cops took up positions in nearby homes, behind cars and in stores.

When the Panthers emerged from the building they entered a scene as chaotic as the damaged office they left. The streets were littered with broken glass and debris. "Tell mother I love her," said Wayne Pharr as he was being led away.

Once the building was cleared, police "discovered" the Panther arsenal. After two hours alone in the headquarters, police invited a reporter inside to observe the illegal weapons. The Panthers insist, however, that they can produce witnesses in the neighborhood who saw police carry the weapons into the building through a rear entrance.

Taken to the police station, the 13 from Panther headquarters were charged with conspiracy to commit murder, conspiracy to commit assault with a deadly weapon upon a police officer, conspiracy to possess illegal weapons and five counts of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to commit murder. They are being held without bail. The eight others were arraigned on various charges including conspiracy to possess illegal weapons and assault with a deadly weapon. Their total bail is \$325,000.

The charge of conspiracy to possess illegal weapons and assault with a deadly weapon was the original charge on which the search and arrest warrants were based. This stems from the Nov. 28

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Seale: we're growing

"It's not stifling the party."

That was the comment of Black Panther party chairman Bobby Seale interviewed in a San Francisco jail last week by a reporter from the Washington Post asking about recent police attacks on the Panthers.

"The more they attack," Seale said, "the more support we get....The more they attack, the more branches we get."

Hilliard convicted

Guardian West Coast Bureau

Berkeley

David Hilliard, Black Panther party chief of staff, was convicted on a misdemeanor charge of possession of a loaded weapon in Berkeley on Dec. 11. The jury was unable to reach a decision on a second charge, possession of a concealed weapon.

Sentencing was set for Dec. 18. Maximum penalty on the charge is six months in jail and a \$500 fine.

The long delayed trial stemmed from the arrest of Hilliard and two other Panthers, Bunchy Carter and John Coltrale outside of Bobby Seale's residence in Berkeley in February 1968. Hilliard stood trial alone as Carter and Coltrale have since been killed.

Hilliard still must face a charge of attempted murder in connection with the April 7, 1968 shootout with Oakland police and a federal charge of threatening the life of the President stemming from his Nov. 15 speech to the antiwar rally in San Francisco. He is currently out on bail.

...Panthers

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confrontation with the police who allegedly sought to instruct the Panthers to tone down their loudspeaker.

The first time SWAT cops acted openly as a unit though not involved in an actual battle was just after the Nov. 28 affair. They surrounded the headquarters and shouted taunting remarks intended to provoke a fight. One source says a particular shouted remark was, "We know you have guns in there niggers—why don't you use them?"

Immediate defense strategy for the Panthers will be to challenge the legality of the search and arrest warrant and to request a full bail hearing, instead of the preliminary hearings.

The viciousness of the police attack, following so closely on the Chicago murders, has solidified the black community in support of the Black Panthers. On the afternoon of the Dec. 8 attack, hundreds of black students from nearby Jefferson High School walked out of class. In the evening, some 350 representatives of various black organizations met to form the Coalition of Community Organizations, which called for the city hall rally. Participants in the coalition include radical groups, community service organizations, the Black Elected Officials' Organization, Urban League, Operation Breadbasket, NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other black organizations.

The coalition demanded that an investigation of the attack be undertaken by the Los Angeles City Council, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Justice Department. A report will be drawn up and presented to the Justice Department charging that there is a national conspiracy against the Panthers.

Panther spokesmen have already announced that the UN Security Council would be asked to investigate U.S. government genocide against black Americans.

The day after the attack, Panther members showed up at headquarters as usual and served hot breakfasts for children. Despite what happened, about half the normal number of children showed up. Later in the day, however, the Department of Health officially condemned the headquarters, putting up a notice, "Unsafe, do not enter," near a front door sign reading, "Free Huey—Feed Hungry Children. Free breakfast for school children."



L. A. cops display Panther "arsenal."

The party held a press conference outside the office the next morning. After declaring that it was an office belonging to the people, the Panthers broke into their own building, began cleaning up the debris and invited students and community residents to view the damage and help with repairs. Help was forthcoming. The hod carriers union sent workers to help rebuild the office and volunteer electricians set about to fix the lighting.

Twice during the day police sought to break up the crowds congregating around the Panther building, resorting at times to tear gas. At 9 p.m., with about 150 people milling outside, the SWAT Squad returned and declared an unlawful assembly.

They moved in with clubs swinging to disperse the crowd. Several people were beaten or arrested. They marched around in military formation for at least an hour,

terrorizing anyone who ventured outside a building or near the office.

State Senator Mervin Dymally, one of several black legislators who had come to the support of the Panthers, tried to negotiate with the police, asking for five minutes to work out an arrangement for removing the crowd. No sooner had he turned his back, police charged a group of youths, striking Dymally on the cheek and temple.

At noon Dec. 11, perhaps the largest rally ever was held on the steps of city hall. About 5000 people—four-fifths black—listened to militant speeches by representatives of militant and moderate black organizations. Speakers from the SCLC and NAACP shared the platform with two Panther women and Angela Davis of the Communist party's Che-Lumumba Club. The Rev. Richard Bass of the NAACP declared the attacks on the Panthers were "part of the national conspiracy to destroy any aggressive, virile black leadership." The Rev. H.H. Brookins, who chaired the rally, expressed the solidarity of the entire group when he said the Panthers were the bull's-eye but the target was the black community.

The police attack was well-planned, at least two weeks in preparation. But it may have misfired, as did the Chicago police attack. Instead of destroying the Panther organization the police have succeeded in solidifying the black community in defense of the Panthers. Even the police now seem to have second thoughts. "In hindsight," commented assistant police chief Robert Houghton, who led the planning and the actual raid, "I don't know whether this was the best tactic."

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